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ABSTRACT

Appropriate format, content, and presentation of personal resumes and job application letters in German are discussed. For the resume, this includes notes on inclusion of pertinent personal data, educational background, military service, work experience, internships or continuing education, and other job-related skills. For the letter of application, the discussion addresses overall format and presentation and details the proper form of necessary components: personal mailing address; the company's address; date; salutation; opening statement; text; closure; and enclosures. Advice is offered on appropriate language style and on information that should not be included. A schematic example of letter format, formats for addresses and resume entries, and lists of useful phrases and terminology are appended. (MSE)

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ED 377 733

WRITING A GERMAN RESUME AND LETTER OF APPLICATION

by Jutta Bailey
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Introduction

Over the past two years I have collected information on the proper format of job applications in Germany. I am compiling a handbook that covers the complete application and all the documents required. In today's presentation I want to concentrate only on the resumé and the letter, the two documents which make up the so-called *Kurzbewerbung*. I will focus on main characteristics in format and major differences between German and American application.

As I explain the components of the resumé and the letter of application, I will address you, the audience, as if you were writing the application. Your handouts include all the information on the overheads; so you can follow along and make notes. If I seem to be pointing out details that seem obvious (like the format for the date), it is because I have found it necessary to do so.

Please interrupt me with your comments and questions as they arise. At the end I would also like your suggestions about the use of English and/or German as the language of presentation. When I include resumé writing in a class, then of course the whole topic is covered in German. For presentation to students actually applying for a position, I usually choose to give explanations in English and examples in Germans, in order to avoid misunderstandings on such an important thing as a job application. Your comments are appreciated.

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The Resumé (*Lebenslauf*)

A. General Observations

The resumé usually takes up one page for students or recent graduates and should be written with the same care given to an American resumé. However, rather than include everything you have ever done, be selective. You would probably list fewer details and leave more blank space than on an American resumé. Keep in mind that your high-school activities, clubs, or part-time jobs in small local businesses may not be very meaningful to a German employer. German students or graduates do not usually include this type of information. Difficult to incorporate are also honors, awards, and scholarships. **Very important**: Do not leave unexplained gaps in your chronology: if necessary explain periods of travel, illness, unemployment, military service, and so forth, in the letter.

List only information you can substantiate with documents, actual performance or knowledge. This applies to work, activities, and your hobbies. Most Germans assume that the qualifications on your resume are absolutely accurate; personal interviews will then focus on other issues like your goals and expectations. If during the course of your interview it becomes apparent that you exaggerated (perhaps you are not really fluent in Spanish), you will lose credibility. [handout/overhead: highlights if intro]

B. Formal Considerations

Today, the typical German resume is the typed *tabellarischer Lebenslauf*. [handout/overhead: sample resume] Hardly anyone requires or even wants a handwritten resume, and the *Handschriftenprobe* is nearly unheard of these days. And while personal data must be included

(including age and marital status), it is no longer customary to include any information about one's parents. A 15- or 16-year old, who has no data to put on the page, might include the parents' names and occupations, especially if one or both have prestigious professions. Otherwise, only the following are included.

1. Personal Data. This information is required on a German resume (along with the photo). The official explanation: The information is needed for taxes and insurance. But Germans can be very direct where age, marital status, or gender are concerned and may simply tell you that you are too young or too old for the job. (Brief comments on proper dates; marital status; nationality [handout/overhead: personal data].)

2. Education. List dates of attendance and graduation or diplomas, starting with high school, in chronological order - not reverse chronology! Names of institutions and degrees are best kept in English. (Brief comments on degrees, major and minor fields [overhead/handout: examples].)

3. Military Service. Simply list the dates and unit. Military service is required of men in Germany and is not usually considered work experience or something to be proud of like in the U.S. [overhead/handout: example]

4. Work experience.

List work experience in chronological order. As always, start with the oldest and end with the newest information. Use the following format.[handout/overhead: examples]

Skip miscellaneous summer or part-time jobs during your high school and college years, UNLESS they show the following:

a) you have experience in an area you want to work in now;

b) you have done something unusual or interesting that was completely outside your field of study. Many companies look for some indication that you have interests outside your field of study. [handout/overhead: examples]

You can put various part-time or summer jobs at the end of the resumé in a separate section, or leave them out altogether.

NO WORK EXPERIENCE? If you have no substantial work experience, you might want to list part-time jobs, especially if they were in a relevant field or if you worked to pay for your studies. Most German students at graduation have no substantial work experience, except perhaps an internship or summer jobs. [handout/overhead: examples]

UNEMPLOYMENT? Do not hide periods of unemployment. Supply a simple explanation.

5. Internships/Continuing Education. Same format as work experience.

6. Other Information. Specifically language and computer skills should be mentioned. You may want to indicate well-known language exams you have taken and passed. [overhead/handout: examples, list of language descriptors]

Extracurricular Activities: Mention a few highlights, not everything you were ever involved with. List *Hobbies* that you really pursue (musical instrument, club membership, probably not reading); show that you are a well-rounded person or that you can devote yourself

to learning a difficult skill. Employers also look for evidence of volunteer work (*soziales Engagement*), which is still relatively unusual, but shows that you can go the extra mile.

The letter of Application (*das Anschreiben*)

A. General Observations

While many formal considerations for German applications are the same as for the U.S. variety, it does not hurt to list them again here [overhead/handout: sample letter]: One page is the preferred length: be concise and informative without too many details. While long sentences seem to be the trademark of much of German literature, aim to write clear sentences of moderate length.

It is not necessary to abide by strict rules of correspondence regarding the number of free lines between segments. You are trying to put as much information as possible on one page; so use as many lines as you can and still produce a neat looking document.

Use plain white paper, possibly off white. All pages should be the same size. You may of course use American paper (8 1/2 x 11 is close to German paper format). Leave margins all around of 2.5 to 3 cm (at least 1 inch). If you do use German paper, be sure to acquire an appropriate envelope (or plastic folder for all your documents).

You should try to use a word processor to facilitate corrections. Definitely type the letter, and carefully check for errors. On the original you should not make any corrections: do not add an **Umlaut** by hand; do not use **ae**, **oe**, **ue** or **ss** as substitutes for the real thing. Consult your word processing manual on how to produce the **ä, ö, ü**, and **ß**. Do not correct typos by hand; do not use correction fluid.

Before you start writing, try to determine the name of a person, to whom you can address your letter. You might call the personnel department and ask. If you are responding to an advertisent, also check whether the position is still open.

Sell yourself, but do not overdo it. Do not pass yourself off as an all-round talent: specialization and expertise are important. No need,to dazzle: instead, persuade the reader that you have mastered your trade. A good policy to observe: **Kein Eigenlob!**

B. The components of the Letter [overhead/handout: schematic letter]

1. Your mailing address. This is the address to which you want responses sent. Include it both on the letter and the resume, avoiding abbreviations.

2. The company's address. Whenever possible, address your letter to an individual you know by name. Telephone the personnel or trainee department and ask for a person who is in charge of the hiring process. Use the person's name in the address and in the greeting.

z.H. is the abbreviation of **zu Händen** ("Attn."). Do not capitalize the **z**. The -n on Herrn is required (dative case of weak nouns). **ACHTUNG!** On July 1, 1993, all German zip codes changed. If you are getting company addresses from reference books, you need to look up the new zip code (**Postleitzahl**). [overhead/handout: sample addresses]

3. Date. Be sure to use the German format for the date; it's harder than you think!

4. Subject of the letter (*die Bezugszeile*). In one or two lines make a reference to the purpose of your letter. If you are responding to an announcement, use the exact wording from the ad if possible and name the source. This is called the **Bezugszeile**, but you should not use the words **Betreff** ("Subject") or the abbreviation **Betr.** ("SU").

5. Salutation. You should probably use only the formulas indicated here [overhead/handout]. No variations please; use only these forms of address. Do not translate "Dear" as "Lieber" or "Liebe"; it is too personal. Even if the company writes to you as "Lieber Herr Meyer", you should stick to the above formulas of address.

Always use a comma after the name. The first word of the letter is then not capitalized, unless it is a noun or a polite form of address (**Sie, Ihr, Ihnen**).

5. The text of the letter. a) One or two sentences serve as introduction (handout/overhead: examples]. b) Your qualifications. First you might state your interest in the position and your personal qualifications. Then list your experience and add brief descriptions or examples (e.g. supervised 6 employees for three years); especially mention relevant innovations.

Select only information relevant to this job: show that you understand what is required for this position. The American approach tends to include everything one has done; Germans are often more selective. Just like on the resumé, Germans prefer a more focussed and specialized (in depth) *Werdegang*, rather than the slightly more American approach of being able to do as many things as possible.

If the ad specifies **Voraussetzung/erforderlich/erwarten wir** etc., this usually indicates a minimum requirement. Prerequisites labeled **wünschenswert, wichtig, von Vorteil**, etc. may increase your chances if you meet them. [overhead/handout: labels]

Point out work experience or training especially important for this position; put details in the résumé. If you do not meet one of the criteria for the job, explain why you should be considered anyway.

c) Any unusual circumstances: frequent change of employment (not always considered favorable

in Germany), long periods of unemployment. Some perfectly good reasons include the following: company dissolved, you want more responsibility, you had no chance for advancement, family.

d) Your availability: state if and when your current job ends or when you could start work in a new position.

e) Request a personal interview.

Do not include the following:

a) Personal problems

b) Salary expectations, unless specifically requested in the advertisement. Then try to circumvent the question by stating your current salary.

c) Criticism of your current employer

d) References unless specifically requested.

References may be needed in the personal interview. You might prepare a list of names of your references (with addresses and phone numbers) and take it along to the interview.

6. Closure. Today, *Mit freundlichen Grüßen* or *Mit freundlichem Gruß* are the most commonly used formulas. Other phrases, like the the older *Hochachtungsvoll* are rarely used. Sign your full name; it should be legible. Also type your name underneath in parentheses even though most Germans do not return that favor.

7. Enclosures. The German word is **Anlagen**. It should be underlined. For the **Kurzbewerbung**, use the singular form: Anlage:

Lebenslauf

Handouts/Overheads

THE LETTER - A schematic example:

Ihr Name
Adresse
Telefon

Firma
Abteilung
z.H. (Name)
Straße
Stadt

Stadt, den 00. 00. 19..

Bezugszeile

Anrede,

Text
.
.

Text
.
.
.
.
.
.
.

Text
.
.
.

Grußformel

Unterschrift

(Name getippt)

Anlage:
.

Examples for addresses

Arbeit AG	Firma
z.H. Frau G. Schmitt	Klein & Co.
Personalabteilung	Verkaufsabteilung
Studienweg 35	Montagestraße 53-58
D-60224 Frankfurt a.M.	D-12456 Berlin
GERMANY	Federal Republic of Germany

Examples for the proper use of names and titles:

z.H. Frau Marianne Montag
z.H. Herrn Klaus Grün
z.H. Dr. Inge Hauer
z.H. Dr. W. Summer

Use the word **Firma** when the company name is not clearly identifiable as such:

Firma
Karla Maurer
Geschäftsführung

Bewerbung für eine Trainee-Ausbildung in Ihrem Hause

Ihre Anzeige in der Frankfurter Allgemeinen Zeitung 21.4.91
Marketingleiter

Ihr Stellenangebot Controller im Handelsblatt vom 24.4.1991

Unser Telefongespräch vom 20.1.1992

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a) If you know the addressee: Sehr geehrte Frau Dr. Hauer,
Sehr geehrter Herr Dr. Summer,
Sehr geehrte Frau Montag,
Sehr geehrter Herr Grün,

b) If you do not know the name: Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren,

Sample sentences:

First sentence:

Sie suchen einen Produktmanager mit mehrjähriger Auslandserfahrung.

im Mai 1993 schließe ich mein Studium mit dem Master of International Management ab und . . .

Second sentence:

Aufgrund meiner Ausbildung und meines bisherigen beruflichen Werdeganges glaube ich, Ihren Anforderungen gerecht werden zu können.

Ich glaube, Ihren Anforderungen zu entsprechen. Ich schreibe zur Zeit meine Diplomarbeit mit dem Thema " . . . "

Nach dem Universitätsstudium im Fach Marketing habe ich zwei Jahre bei der Firma xxx . . .

Ich war als . . . tätig.

Ich habe mich intensiv mit . . . beschäftigt.

Ich habe mehrere Praktika in den Verkaufsabteilungen namhafter Unternehmen absolviert.

Mir unterstehen derzeit 20 Mitarbeiter.

Zu meinem Aufgabengebiet gehört . . .

Ich habe drei Jahre lang ein Qualitätsprodukt betreut.

Misc. examples for the letter:

Wegen Konkurs meines Arbeitgebers mußte ich den Arbeitsplatz nach einem Jahr wechseln.

Ich könnte zum 1. 8. 1992 mit der Trainee-Ausbildung anfangen.

Nach Abschluß meines Studiums im August 1993 stünde ich jederzeit zur Verfügung.

Ich würde mich freuen, von Ihnen zu hören.

Zu einem Vorstellungsgespräch stehe ich Ihnen jederzeit zur Verfügung.

Sollten Sie an meiner Bewerbung Interesse haben, würde ich mich freuen, Weiteres in einem persönlichen Gespräch mit Ihnen erörtern zu können.

Sie können mich wochentags unter folgender Telefonnummer erreichen:

Examples: personal data

Studienanschrift: 15439 N. 58th Street
Phoenix, Arizona 85034 USA

Heimatanschrift: 38 Green Street
Arlington, Virginia 72226 USA

Persönliche Daten: Geburtsdatum: 20. März 1965
Geburtsort: Austin, Texas
Familienstand: verheiratet
Staatsangehörigkeit: amerikanisch

Variationen:

Ständiger Wohnsitz
Derzeitiger Wohnsitz; Gegenwärtiger Wohnsitz

Familienstand: ledig
verheiratet
verwitwet
geschieden

Staatsangehörigkeit: amerikanisch
Nationalität: Amerika
Staatsbürgerschaft: USA

Examples: education; military service

Ausbildung:	8/90 - 8/92	Greenleaf High School Abschluß: Hochschulreife
	8/80-5/84	University of Texas, Austin, Texas, US Fachrichtung: Volkswirtschaft Abschluß: Bachelor of Science
	8/90-12/91	American Graduate School of International Management Schwerpunkte: EDV, Statistik
	SS 1991	Auslandsstudium: EBS, Schloß Reichartshausen
	12/91	Abschluß: **Master of International Management**
Wehrdienst:	1982-1985	U.S. Army, Texas, USA

Examples: work experience

Schematic

date	Company name, city division/function/type of work
Datum	Firmenname, Ort Verantwortungsbereich

Berufserfahrung:	8/89 - 7/90	Rechtsanwaltskanzlei Grey Kansas City, Missouri, USA - Anwältin im Bereich Handelsrecht
	1990 - 1991	Green-Yellow Chemical Co. Detroit, USA - Rechtsabteilung - Einsatz im Personalbereich
	1991 bis heute	Arizona Department of Justice Phoenix, Arizona USA -Forschung im Bereich Arbeitsrecht

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Sozialarbeit mit einer Kirchengruppe (Bau von Kinderspielplätzen)

Landwirtschaftliche Tätigkeit auf dem elterlichen Hof

In den Semesterferien Tätigkeit in einer Zweigstelle der First National Bank in Chicago.

Teilzeitarbeit als Kellner zur Finanzierung des Studiums.

9/86 - 8/87 Arbeitslosigkeit durch Konkurs des Arbeitgebers.

2/88 - 7/88 Reisen durch Ostasien.

The following are commonly accepted descriptors for language ability.

Grundkenntnisse	rudimentary level
gut	good
gut in Wort und Schrift	good spoken and written skills
sehr gut	very good
sehr gut in Wort und Schrift	very good spoken/written skills
fließend	fluent
Muttersprache	native

Sprachkenntnisse: Englisch (Muttersprache), Japanisch Grundkenntnisse

Französisch (Diplôme Supérieure de Français des Affaires de la Chambre de Commerce et Industrie de Paris)
Deutsch (Mittelstufenprüfung Goethe Institut)

EDV-Kenntnisse: Textverarbeitung, Tabellenkalkulation;
Lotus 1-2-3, Harvard Graphics

Hobbies/Interessen: Moderne Literatur, Tennis, Klavier

Außercurriculare Aktivitäten: Redakteur der Studentenzeitung an der AGSIM
Freiwillige Sozialarbeit mit Lernbehinderten

Assistentin in der Sprachabteilung an der AGSIM
Mitarbeit am Studentenjahrbuch
Tutor im Computerlabor
Organisation von Konzerten